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## AFFINITIES OF BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

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It has long been known that many analogies exist between Buddhism and Christianity. The ceremonies, ritual and rites of the Buddhists strikingly resemble those of the Roman Catholic Church. The Buddhist priests are monks. They take the same three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are binding on those of the Roman Church. They are mendicants, like the mendicant orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic. They are tonsured; use strings of beads, like the rosary, with which to count their prayers; have incense and candles in their worship; use fasts, processions, litanies, and holy water. They have something akin to the adoration of saints; repeat prayers in an unknown tongue; have a chanted psalmody with a double choir; and suspend the censer from five chains. In China, some Buddhists worship the image of a virgin, called the Queen of Heaven, having an infant in her arms, and holding a cross. In Thibet the Grand Lamas wear a miter, dalmatica, and cope, and pronounce a benediction on the laity by extending the right hand over their heads. The Dalai-Lama resembles the Pope, and is regarded as the head of the Church. The worship of relics is very ancient among the Buddhists, and so are pilgrimages to sacred places.

Besides these resemblances in outward ceremonies, more important ones appear in the inner life and history of the two religions. Both belong to those systems which derive their character from a human founder, and not from a national tendency; to the class which contains the religions of Moses, Zoroaster, Confucius, and Mohammed, and not to that in which the Brahmanical, Egyptian, Scandinavian, Greek and Roman religions are found. Both Buddhism and Christianity are catholic, and not ethnic; that is, not confined to a single race or nation, but, by their missionary spirit, passing beyond these

boundaries, and making converts among many races. Christianity began among the Jews as a Semitic religion, but, being rejected by the Jewish nation, established itself among the Aryan races of Europe. In the same way Buddhism, beginning among an Aryan people—the Hindus—was expelled from Hindostan, and established itself among the Mongol races of Eastern Asia. Besides its resemblances to the Roman Catholic side of Christendom, Buddhism has still closer analogies with the Protestant Church. Like Protestantism, it is a reform, which rejects a hierarchal system and does away with a priestly caste. Like Protestantism, it has emphasized the purely humane side of life, and is a religion of humanity rather than of piety. Both the Christian and Buddhist Churches teach a divine incarnation, and they worship a God-man.

Are these remarkable analogies only casual resemblances, or are they real affinities? By affinity, we here mean genetic relationship. Are Buddhism and Christianity related as mother and child, one being derived from the other; or are they related by both being derived from some common ancestor? Is either derived from the other, as Christianity from Judaism, or Protestantism from the Papal Church? That there can be no such affinity as this, seems evident from history. History shows no trace of the contact which would be required for such influence. If Christianity had taken its customs from Buddhism, or Buddhism from Christianity, there must have been ample historic evidence of the fact. But, instead of this, history shows that each has grown up by its own natural development, and has unfolded its qualities separately and alone. The law of evolution also teaches that such great systems do not come from imitation, but as growths from a primal germ.

Nor does history give the least evidence of a common ancestry from which both took their common traits. We know that Buddhism was derived from Brahmanism, and that Christianity was derived from Judaism. Now, Judaism and Brahmanism have few analogies; they could not, therefore, have transmitted to their offspring what they did not themselves possess. Brahmanism came from an Aryan stock, in Central Asia; Judaism from a Semitic stem, thousands of miles to the west. If Buddhism and Christianity came from a common source, that source must have antedated both the Mosaic and Brahmanical systems. Even then it would be a case of atavism in which the

original type disappeared in the children to reappear in the later descendants.

Are, then, these striking resemblances, and others which are still to be mentioned, only accidental analogies? This does not necessarily follow; for there is a third alternative. They may be what are called in science homologies; that is, the same law working out similar results under the same conditions, though under different circumstances. The whale lives under different circumstances from other mammalia; but, being a mammal, he has a like osseous structure. What seems to be a fin, being dissected, turns out to be an arm, with hand and fingers. There are like homologies in history. Take the instance of the English and French revolutions. In each case the legitimate king was tried, condemned, and executed. A republic followed. The republic gave way before a strong-handed usurper. Then the original race of kings was restored; but, having learned nothing and forgotten nothing, they were displaced a second time, and a constitutional monarch placed on the throne, who, though not the legitimate king, still belonged to the same race. Here the same laws of human nature have worked out similar results; for no one would suggest that France had copied its revolutions from England. And, in religion, human nature reproduces similar customs and ceremonies under like conditions. When, for instance, you have a mechanical system of prayer, in which the number of prayers is of chief importance, there must be some way of counting them, and so the rosary has been invented independently in different religions. We have no room to point out how this law has worked in other instances; but it is enough to refer to the principle.

Besides these resemblances between Buddhism and Christianity, there are also some equally remarkable differences, which should be noticed.

The first of these is the striking fact that Buddhism has been unable to recognize the existence of the Infinite Being. It has been called atheism by the majority of the best authorities. Even Arthur Lillie, who defends this system from the charge of agnosticism, says: \* "An agnostic school of Buddhism without doubt exists. It professes plain atheism, and holds that every mortal, when he escapes from re-births, and the causation of Karma by the awakening of the Bodhi or gnosis, will be anni-

\* "Buddha and Early Buddhism." Trübner & Co., 1881.

hilated. This Buddhism, by Eugène Burnouf, Saint-Hilaire, Max Müller, Csoma de Körös, and, I believe, almost every writer of note, is pronounced the original Buddhism—the Buddhism of the South.” Almost every writer of note, therefore, who has studied Buddhism in the Pali, Singhalese, Chinese, and other languages, and has had direct access to its original sources, has pronounced it a system of atheism. But this opinion is opposed to the fact that Buddhists have everywhere worshiped unseen and superhuman powers, erected magnificent temples, maintained an elaborate ritual, and adored Buddha as the supreme ruler of the worlds. How shall we explain this paradox? All depends on the definition we give to the word “atheism.” If a system is atheistic which sees only the temporal, and not the eternal; which knows no God as the author, creator, and ruler of Nature; which ascribes the origin of the universe to natural causes, to which only the finite is knowable, and the infinite unknowable—then Buddhism is atheism. But, in that case, much of the polytheism of the world must be regarded as atheism; for polytheism has largely worshiped finite gods. The whole race of Olympian deities were finite beings. Above them ruled the everlasting necessity of things. But who calls the Greek worshipers atheists? The Buddha, to most Buddhists, is a finite being, one who has passed through numerous births, has reached Nirvana, and will one day be superseded by another Buddha. Yet, for the time, he is the Supreme Being, Ruler of all the Worlds. He is the object of worship, and really divine, if in a subordinate sense.

I would not, therefore, call this religion atheism. No religion which worships superhuman powers can justly be called atheistic on account of its meager metaphysics. How many Christians there are who do not fully realize the infinite and eternal nature of the Deity! To many he is no more than the Buddha is to his worshipers—a supreme being, a mighty ruler, governing all things by his will. How few see God everywhere in nature, as Jesus saw him, letting his sun shine on the evil and good, and sending his rain on the just and unjust. How few see him in all of life, so that not a sparrow dies, or a single hair of the head falls, without the Father. Most Christians only recognize the Deity as occasionally interfering by special providences, particular judgments, and the like.

But in Christianity this ignorance of the eternal nature of God is the exception, while in Buddhism it is the rule. In the reaction against Brahmanism, the Brahmanic faith in the infinite was wholly lost. In the fully developed system of the ancient Hindoo religion the infinite overpowered the finite, the temporal world was regarded as an illusion, and only the eternal was real. The reaction from this extreme was so complete as to carry the Buddhists to the exact opposite. If to the Brahman all the finite visible world was only *maya*—illusion, to the Buddhists all the infinite unseen world was unknowable, and practically nothing.

Perhaps the most original feature of Christianity is the fact that it has combined in a living synthesis that which in other systems was divided. Jesus regarded love to God and love to man as identical,—positing a harmonious whole of time and eternity, piety and humanity, faith and works,—and thus laid the foundation of a larger system than either Brahmanism or Buddhism. He did not invent piety, nor discover humanity. Long before he came the Brahmanic literature had sounded the deepest depths of spiritual life, and the Buddhist missionaries had preached universal benevolence to mankind. But the angelic hymn which foretold the new religion as bringing at once “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men,” indicated the essence of the faith which was at the same time a heavenly love and an earthly blessing. This difference of result in the two systems came probably from the different methods of their authors. With Jesus life was the source of knowledge; the life was the light of men. With the Buddha, reflection, meditation, thought was the source of knowledge. In this, however, he included intuition no less than reflection. Sakya-muni understood perfectly that a mere intellectual judgment possessed little motive power; therefore he was not satisfied till he had obtained an intuitive perception of truth. That alone gave at once rest and power. But as the pure intellect, even in its highest act, is unable to grasp the infinite, the Buddha was an agnostic on this side of his creed by the very success of his method. Who, by searching, can find out God? The infinite can only be known by the process of living experience. This was the method of Jesus, and has been that of his religion. For what is faith but that receptive state of mind which

waits on the Lord to receive the illumination which it cannot create by its own processes? However this may be, it is probable that the fatal defect in Buddhism which has neutralized its generous philanthropy and its noble humanities has been the absence of the inspiration which comes from the belief in an eternal world. Man is too great to be satisfied with time alone, or eternity alone; he needs to live from and for both. Hence, Buddhism is an arrested religion, while Christianity is progressive. Christianity has shown the capacity of outgrowing its own defects and correcting its own mistakes. For example, it has largely outgrown its habit of persecuting infidels and heretics. No one is now put to death for heresy. It has also passed out of the stage in which religion was considered to consist in leaving the world and entering a monastery. The anchorites of the early centuries are no longer to be found in Christendom. Even in Catholic countries the purpose of monastic life is no longer to save the soul by ascetic tortures, but to attain some practical end. The Protestant Reformation, which broke the yoke of priestly power and set free the mind of Europe, was a movement originating in Christianity itself, like other developments of a similar kind. No such signs of progress exist in the system of Buddhism. It has lost the missionary ardor of its early years; it has ceased from creating a vast literature such as grew up in its younger days; it no longer produces any wonders of architecture. It even lags behind the active life of the countries where it has its greatest power.

It is a curious analogy between the two systems that, while neither the Christ nor the Buddha practiced or taught asceticism, their followers soon made the essence of religion to consist in some form of monastic life. Both Jesus and Sakya-muni went about doing good. Both sent their followers into the world to preach a gospel. Jesus, after thirty years of a retired life, came among men "eating and drinking," and associating with "publicans and sinners." Sakya-muni, after spending some years as an anchorite, deliberately renounced that mode of religion as unsatisfactory, and associated with all men, as Jesus afterward did. Within a few centuries after their death, their followers relapsed into ascetic and monastic practices; but with this difference, that while in Christendom there have always been both a regular and a secular clergy, in the Buddhist countries the whole priesthood live in monasteries. They have no parish

priests, unless as an exception. While in Christian countries the clergy has become more and more a practical body, in sympathy with the common life, in Buddhist lands they live apart and exercise little influence on the civil condition of the people.

Nor must we pass by the important fact that the word Christendom is synonymous with a progressive civilization, while Buddhism is everywhere connected with one which is arrested and stationary. The boundaries of the Christian religion are exactly coëxtensive with the advance of science, art, literature; and with the continued accumulation of knowledge, power, wealth, and the comforts of human life. According to Kuenen,\* one of the most recent students of these questions, this difference is due to the principle of hope which exists in Christianity, but is absent in Buddhism. The one has always believed in a kingdom of God here and a blessed Immortality hereafter. Buddhism has not this hope; and this, says Kuenen, "is a blank which nothing can fill." So large a thinker as Albert Réville has expressed his belief that even the intolerance of Christianity indicated a passionate love of truth which has created modern science. He says that, "if Europe had not passed through those ages of intolerance, it is doubtful whether the science of our day would have ever arrived."† It is only within the boundaries of nations professing the Christian faith that we must go to-day to learn the latest discoveries in science, the best works of art, the most flourishing literature. Only within the same circle of Christian states is there a government by law, and not by will. Only within these boundaries have the rights of the individual been secured, while the power of the state has been increased. Government by law, joined with personal freedom, is only to be found where the faith exists which teaches that God not only supports the universal order of natural things, but is also the friend of the individual soul; and in just that circle of states in which the doctrine is taught that there is no individual soul for God to love and no Divine presence in the order of nature, human life has subsided into apathy, progress has ceased, and it has been found impossible to construct national unity. Saint-Hilaire affirms‡ that "in politics and legislation the dogma of

\* Hibbert Lectures, 1882, page 291.

† A. Réville: "Prolégomènes de l'histoire des religions."

‡ "Le Bouddha et sa religion. Par J. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, Paris." Page 149.



Buddhism has remained inferior even to that of Brahmanism," and "has been able to do nothing to constitute states or to govern them by equitable rules." These Buddhist nations are really six: Siam, Burmah, Nepaul, Thibet, Tartary, and Ceylon. The activity and social progress in China and Japan are no exceptions to this rule; for in neither country has Buddhism any appreciable influence on the character of the people.

To those who deny that the theology of a people influences its character, it may be instructive to see how exactly the good and evil influences of Buddhism correspond to the positive and negative traits of its doctrine. Its merits, says Saint-Hilaire, are its practical character, its abnegation of vulgar gratifications, its benevolence, mildness, sentiment of human equality, austerity of manners, dislike of falsehood, and respect for the family. Its defects are want of social power, egotistical aims, ignorance of the ideal good, of the sense of human right and human freedom, skepticism, incurable despair, contempt of life. All its human qualities correspond to its doctrinal teaching from the beginning. It has always taught benevolence, patience, self-denial, charity, and toleration. Its defects arise inevitably from its negative aim—to get rid of sorrow and evil by sinking into apathy, instead of seeking for the triumph of good and the coming of a reign of God here on the earth.

As regards the Buddha himself, modern students differ widely. Some, of course, deny his very existence, and reduce him to a solar myth. M. Emile Senart, as quoted by Oldenberg,\* following the *Lalita Vistara* as his authority, makes of him a solar hero, born of the morning cloud, contending by the power of light with the demons of darkness, rising in triumph to the zenith of heavenly glory, then passing into the night of Nirvana and disappearing from the scene.

The difficulty about this solar myth theory is that it proves too much; it is too powerful a solvent; it would dissolve all history. How easy it would be, in a few centuries, to turn General Washington and the American Revolution into a solar myth! Great Britain, a region of clouds and rain, represents the Kingdom of Darkness; America, with more sunshine, is the Day. Great Britain, as Darkness, wishes to devour the Young Day, or dawn of light, which America is about to diffuse over the earth. But Washington, the solar hero, arrives. He is from Virginia, that is, born of a virgin. He was born in Feb-

\* Senart: "*Essai sur la légende du Buddha.*" Paris, 1875.

ruary, in the sign of Aquarius and the Fishes,—plainly referring to the birth of the sun from the ocean. As the sun surveys the earth, so Washington was said to be a surveyor of many regions. The story of the fruitless attempts of the Indians to shoot him at Braddock's defeat is evidently legendary; and, in fact, this battle itself must be a myth, for how can we suppose two English and French armies to have crossed the Atlantic, and then gone into a wilderness west of the mountains, to fight a battle? So easy is it to turn history into a solar myth.

The character of Sakya-muni must be learned from his religion and from authentic tradition. In many respects his character and influence resembled that of Jesus. He opposed priestly assumptions, taught the equality and brotherhood of man, sent out disciples to teach his doctrine, was a reformer who relied on the power of truth and love. Many of his reported sayings resemble those of Jesus. He was opposed by the Brahmins as Jesus by the Pharisees. He compared the Brahmins who followed their traditions to a chain of blind men, who move on, not seeing where they go.\* Like Jesus, he taught that mercy was better than sacrifices. Like Jesus, he taught orally, and left no writing. Jesus did not teach in Hebrew, but in the Aramaic, which was the popular dialect, and so the Buddha did not speak to the people in Sanskrit, but in their own tongue, which was Pāli. Like Jesus, he seems to have instructed his hearers by parables or stories. He was one of the greatest reformers the world has ever seen; and his influence, after that of the Christ, has probably exceeded that of any one who ever lived.

But, beside such real resemblances between these two masters, we are told of others still more striking, which would certainly be hard to explain unless one of the systems had borrowed from the other. These are said to be the preëxistence of Buddha in heaven; his birth of a virgin; salutation by angels; presentation in the temple; baptism by fire and water; dispute with the doctors; temptation in the wilderness; transfiguration; descent into hell; ascension into heaven.† If these legends could be traced back to the time before Christ, then it might be argued that the Gospels have borrowed from Buddhism. Such, however, is not the fact. These stories are taken from the *Lalitā*

\* Oldenberg: "Buddha, sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde. Berlin, 1881." This is one of the latest and best books on our subject.

† Romantic Legend of Buddha. By Samuel Beal. London, 1875. Eitel. Three Lectures on Buddhism.

Vistara, which, according to Rhys Davids,\* was probably composed between six hundred and a thousand years after the time of Buddha, by some Buddhist poet in Nepaul. Rhys Davids, one of our best authorities, says of this poem: "As evidence of what early Buddhism actually was, it is of about the same value as some mediæval poem would be of the real facts of the Gospel history."† M. Ernest de Bunsen, in his work on the "Angel Messiah," has given a very exhaustive statement, says Mr. Davids, of all the possible channels through which Christians can be supposed to have borrowed from the Buddhists. But Mr. Davids's conclusion is that he finds no evidence of any such communications of ideas from the East to the West.‡ The difference between the wild stories of the Lalita Vistara, and the sober narratives of the Gospels is quite apparent. Another writer, Professor Seydel, § thinks, after a full and careful examination, that only five facts in the Gospels may have been borrowed from Buddhism. These are: (1) The fast of Jesus before his work; (2) The question in regard to the blind man—"Who did sin, this man, or his parents?"; (3) The preëxistence of Christ; (4) The presentation in the Temple; (5) Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree, compared with Buddha under a Bo tree. But Kuenen has examined these parallels, and considers them merely accidental coincidences. And, in truth, it is very hard to conceive of one religion borrowing its facts or legends from another, if that other stands in no historic relation to it. That Buddhism should have taken much from Brahmanism is natural; for Brahmanism was its mother. That Christianity should have borrowed many of its methods from Judaism is equally natural; for Judaism was its cradle. Modern travelers in Burma and Tartary have found that the Buddhists hold a kind of camp-meeting in the open air, where they pray and sing. Suppose that some critic, noticing this, should assert that, when Wesley and his followers established similar customs, they must have borrowed them from the Buddhists. The absurdity would be evident. New religions grow, they are not imitations.

It has been thought, however, that Christianity was derived from the Essenes, because of certain resemblances, and it is argued that the Essenes must have obtained their monastic habits from the Therapeutæ in Egypt, and that the Therapeutæ got them from the Buddhists, because they could not have got

\* Hibbert Lectures. *Origin and Growth of Buddhism*. By T. W. Rhys Davids. 1881. † *Ibid.*, page 143. ‡ "Buddhistisch-Christliche Harmonie."

them elsewhere. This theory, however, has been dismissed from the scene by a young German scholar,\* who has proved that the essay on the *Therapeutæ* ascribed to Philo was really written by a Christian anchorite in the third or fourth century.

The result, then, of our investigation, is this: There is no probability that the analogies between Christianity and Buddhism have been derived the one from the other. They have come from the common and universal needs and nature of man, which repeat themselves again and again in like positions and like circumstances. That Jesus and Buddha should both have retired into the wilderness before undertaking their great work is probable, for it has been the habit of other reformers to let a period of meditation precede their coming before the world. That both should have been tempted to renounce their enterprise is also in accordance with human nature. That, in after times, the simple narratives should be overlaid with additions, and a whole mass of supernatural wonders added—as we find in the Apocryphal Gospels and the *Lalita Vistara*—is also in accordance with the working of the human mind.

Laying aside all such unsatisfactory resemblances, we must regard the Buddha as having been one of the noblest of men, and one whom Jesus would have readily welcomed as a fellow-worker and a friend. He opposed a dominant priesthood, maintained the equal religious rights of all mankind, overthrew caste, encouraged woman to take her place as man's equal, forbade all bloody sacrifices, and preached a religion of peace and good will, seeking to triumph only in the fair conflict of reason with reason. If he was defective in the loftiest instincts of the soul; if he knew nothing of the infinite and eternal; if he saw nothing permanent in the soul of man; if his highest purpose was negative—to get rid of pain, sorrow, anxiety, toil,—let us still be grateful for the influence which has done so much to tame the savage Mongols, and to introduce hospitality and humanity into the homes of Lassa and Siam. If Edwin Arnold, a poet, idealizes him too highly, it is the better fault, and should be easily forgiven. Hero-worshippers are becoming scarce in our time; let us make the most of those we have.

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

\* P. E. Lucius: "Die Therapeuten und ihre Stellung, &c. Strassburg, 1880."